



Legislative
Services Agency

MINUTES

New Iowans Study Committee Public Hearing

October 4, 2005

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Joe Bolkcom,
Co-chairperson
Senator Paul McKinley,
Co-chairperson
Senator James Hahn
Senator Jack Hatch

Representative Mary Lou Freeman,
Co-chairperson
Representative Debra Berry
Representative George Eichhorn
Representative Wayne Ford

MEETING IN BRIEF

- I. Procedural Business.
- II. Invited Speakers.
- III. Public Comments.
- IV. Materials on File With the Legislative Services Agency.

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I. Procedural Business.

Call to Order. Co-chairperson Paul McKinley called the public hearing to order at 6:09 p.m. in Room 121 of the Advanced Technology Center at the Indian Hills Community College, Ottumwa, Iowa. Also present were Senator Keith Kreiman and Representatives Mary Gaskill and Dave Heaton. There were approximately 52 members of the public in attendance.

Adjournment. The public hearing was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Opening Remarks. Co-chairperson McKinley welcomed the audience to the public hearing and explained to them the creation of the Committee, its membership, and the parameters under which it will operate for the hearing.

II. Invited Speakers.

Mr. Dale Uehling — Mayor of Ottumwa. Mr. Uehling welcomed attendees to Ottumwa and offered a background for the rapid growth of new Iowans in the Ottumwa population and described his extensive involvement in integrating new Iowans into the city. The primary cause for the rapid growth of new Iowans in Ottumwa, he stated, was a 1997 fire that destroyed the Excel plant (now Cargill Meat Solution). The company decided not only to rebuild in Ottumwa, but to expand, which would necessitate bringing more workers into the community. To assist Cargill, Mr. Uehling and Mr. Steve Wise, Executive Director of the Ottumwa Area Development Corporation, started a diversity task force to integrate new Iowans into the community.

At the time of the fire, Cargill employed 1,200 people. It now employs 2,300. The percentage of Ottumwa's population made up of immigrants increased from less than 1 percent in 1997 to between 10-12 percent, currently. Hispanics make up the majority of these new Iowans (3,500 to 4,000), though immigrants from Africa and the Ukraine have also come to live in Ottumwa since 1998. Mr. Uehling observed that the Ottumwa police do not engage in racial profiling. However, he described as problems afflicting the community, landlords who take advantage of the new Iowans, overcrowding, inadequate health care, and an insufficient number of bilingual interpreters. Every three years, the city inspects rental properties that are registered with the city. He praised the partnership between Indian Hills Community College and Cargill, and the work of the New Iowan Center, a one-stop service center for new Iowans established by the Iowa Department of Workforce Development with funding support from Ottumwa.

Mr. Himar Hernandez — Director of the New Iowan Center in Ottumwa and Interpreter for the Public Hearing. Mr. Hernandez provided the members with packets identifying the services provided by Ottumwa's New Iowan Center. The center serves individuals and businesses in the community, and in the past year, he said, helped 4,500 people. The center's goals are to educate the community so that the community is inclined to welcome the newcomers, and to acclimate new Iowans to the town, make them aware of available resources, and to help them become good citizens, respect their neighbors, and to invest in the community. The



center recently added new services, such as citizenship assistance. In the past five years, 18 Hispanic businesses have opened in Ottumwa, 17 in downtown buildings, which are often repaired in the process.

Ms. Phyllis Baker — Lucas County Treasurer. Ms. Baker listed the requirements a person must satisfy to qualify for an Iowa driver's license or Iowa identification. She noted that written driver's tests are available in a variety of different languages for people who are required to take the test and have the proper identification. She sympathized with those who are frustrated in trying to procure the necessary documents. An individual applying for a driver's license must include the individual's social security number on the application, though the law authorizes the Department of Transportation to waive that requirement for foreign nationals temporarily present in this state (Iowa Code section 321.182, subsection 1). Though her office would like to be welcoming, Ms. Baker said she sometimes has to question the documentation presented with an application in order to prevent fraud. She advised prospective applicants to continue working with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Bureau of the federal Department of Homeland Security to access the necessary documents. She stated that her office would provide as much help as possible to applicants in their efforts to qualify for an Iowa driver's license.

Sister Irene Munoz — Pastoral Minister for the Multi-Cultural Ministry at St. Mary's of the Visitation Catholic Church. Sister Munoz observed that the city of Ottumwa was recently showcased on ABC's Good Morning America (September 25) for handling the rapid growth of its Latino population well. She works hands-on with immigrants. Though the people of the Latino community speak Spanish, she noted there are cultural differences as the people come from Mexico and various Central American countries, and all communities must learn to work together. Latinos recently sponsored Latino Independence Days, which celebrated and increased the awareness of these communities. She observed that her church, St. Mary's, offers regular masses in Spanish to more than 300 Latino congregants.

She described driver's licenses as a necessity and said many Latinos would take any exam and pay insurance required to achieve a license. She also listed the following as other necessities for new Iowans: free immigration legal assistance, more opportunities to learn new skills and trades, capital to begin small businesses, a social security number, paid or staff interpreters at county jails and driver's license stations, repaired legal avenues to allow safe entry into the United States, opportunities for legalization of the undocumented worker, temporary worker programs with a path to permanency, efforts to reunite families, passage of the federal DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, more Head Start preschool programs, teachers and police officers who reflect the community's diverse population, more mentors, cessation of human trafficking, health care, more English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered at convenient times, child care to allow people to take ESL courses, and university and community college degrees in interpreting. She praised the community's active diversity task force, the students from Central College in Pella who assist



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new lowans through service learning projects, and the many churches in the area that assist with English language courses.

Ms. Sharon Padget — Ottumwa High School ELL Teacher and Migrant Summer School Teacher. Ms. Padget identified the challenges in teaching ESL to English language learners. She noted that 80 percent of the students in one elementary school are identified as ESL and that she must recognize three dialects of Spanish. Research, she observed, finds that students need to be in ESL programs for five to seven years to acquire a second language, so she recommends that the state increase to at least five, at optimum seven, years the funding provided for ESL programs. The state currently caps funding at three years (Iowa Code section 280.4, subsection 3). She praised the ESL consultant employed by Area Education Agency (AEA) 15 and the other assistance provided by the AEA, including Leapfrog, Quantum pads and books, and the Palm handhelds her school is piloting. The migrant summer school program has been successful, but as the community becomes less mobile and settles down, the funding is reduced. The program offers intense help in science, which has increased the school's Iowa Test of Educational Development scores, but they will not be able to maintain this upward trend without more funding.

III. Public Comments.

The Committee heard testimony from 12 individuals who signed up to speak at the hearing. The individuals who spoke include the following:

Rosa Salazar
Theresa (no surname provided)
Ron Brown
Elias Espinoza
Miguel Ornelas
Angel Garcia
Mary Ann Reiter
Noe Hernandez
Lorena Perez
Roberto Marquez
Gabriela Andrade
Argelia Corona

The issues and concerns presented by the speakers include the following:

- Discrimination in sentencing and treatment in jails, housing, and health care exists and must be eliminated.
- The necessity of a driver's license, whether temporary with an option for renewal or permanent, to enable new lowans to live and work in the community. Everything is so spread out that a vehicle and license are vital for access to work, taking kids to school, shopping, trips to the doctor, vehicle registration, reporting accidents without fear of



recrimination, and for car insurance. A number of speakers noted that they want to buy car insurance but cannot. Often, new lowans must register a vehicle in another person's name in order to purchase a vehicle. Sometimes, the purchaser does not know the person in whose name they purchase a vehicle, creating a fear that the person whose name is used could take advantage of the buyer. One speaker commented that it would be safer and better for everyone if the state allowed new lowans to receive driver's licenses and buy insurance. Another speaker recommended that the state follow the example of Milwaukee which, she stated, provides for easier access to driver's licenses. Another speaker, who has lived in the U.S. for over 30 years and has been a citizen for a number of years, stated he felt it was an injustice to be asked for his citizenship document when he recently applied for a driver's license.

- The need for official identification in order to open a bank account and to start utility services in the applicant's real name.

- The need to report domestic abuse and receive assistance from the police without fear of reprisal or deportation.

- The need to pressure the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Bureau to cooperate more, act quickly, and clear paperwork barriers to citizenship. Work permits often expire before the bureau can finish the paperwork that immigrants have submitted as and when required. Those whose work permits have expired cannot work, qualify for food stamps, pay rent, or draw unemployment. The guest worker program would make the process even more difficult. Some of the businesses that have come to Ottumwa recently and which employ immigrants are not union-friendly and do not pay living wages, health care insurance, or pensions.

- The need for all employers to provide employees with proper benefits.

- The lack of Hispanic police officers. The state and local governments need to recruit officers from other states if Hispanic officers cannot be found in Iowa.

- The need to see the humanity in new lowans, who come not to sell drugs or engage in criminal activities, but to work hard. Hardworking new lowans want to take classes at the community college, but are too tired or do not have the time to fit English and other classes into their schedules. New lowans love the state and wish to remain, but greater effort must be made to keep new lowans in the state.

- Inadequate availability of visa waivers for international professionals, such as medical professionals.

- Elimination of the barriers to services, health care, housing, and educational opportunities for those who arrive without documentation.

- The need to increase the strength of, and the opportunities to access, vital ESL programs.

- The need to improve the relations between Anglos and new lowans. A successful example cited was the Independence Fiesta, which attracted Anglos and Hispanics alike. The event raised over \$20,000, \$2,000 of which was donated to the Red Cross.



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- The need for increased funding to support teen programs and to provide educational services to reduce the rates of teen pregnancy and gang participation.
- The need for more hours of informative radio programming to make the Hispanic community aware of the things happening in the greater community.
- Making in-state tuition available for undocumented immigrant students.
- The need to make the journey from Central America and Mexico to Iowa safer and better organized.
- Skilled training is needed to enable new lowans to work in occupations that are not as dangerous as some of the jobs open to immigrants. People are getting hurt and are not being utilized to the best of their abilities. People in the community want to better themselves, to become mechanics and welders. The new lowans who need this training are paying taxes, and should be able to access the same opportunities as everyone else.
- Investigation of unsafe work environments and companies that take advantage of immigrant employees (by, for example, paying only \$7 an hour), or do not provide the tools needed to do the job properly, or expose their employees to harmful chemicals.

IV. Materials on File With the Legislative Services Agency (available upon request or online at:

http://www.legis.state.ia.us/scripts/docmgr/docmgr_comdocs.dll/showtypeinterim?id=75&type=ih&fy=2005&com=75).

- A. List of speakers.
- B. List of attendees.
- C. A folder provided by Mr. Himar Hernandez containing the following:
 - A letter from Mr. James Follett, Commissioner of the Division of Latino Affairs.
 - The 7th Annual Strengthening and Valuing Latino/a Communities in Iowa Conference 2005 brochure and registration form.
 - Materials from the New lowan Center, including 2004 and 2005 Ottumwa Annual Services Provided reports.
- D. A statement to the New lowans Legislative Interim from Senator Keith Kreiman.
- E. Written testimony from Sister Irene Munoz, HM.

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